UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/48/545
4 November 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-eighth session
Agenda item 93

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Report of the Secretary-General

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1 - 3	2
II.	GENERAL TRENDS	4 - 9	2
III.	SCOPE OF WORK AT COUNTRY LEVEL	10 - 15	4
IV.	STRENGTHENING UPSTREAM CAPACITIES, INCLUDING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	16 - 31	5
V.	NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE AN INTEGRATED AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACH	32 - 45	8
VI.	RESOURCE MOBILIZATION FOR POVERTY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES	46 - 50	10
VII.	INTER-AGENCY FOCUS ON IMPROVED TECHNICAL COOPERATION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION	51 - 53	11

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In response to General Assembly resolution 45/264 of 13 May 1991 and Economic and Social Council decision 1992/204, the Secretary-General submitted a report in 1992 to the coordination segment of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council on "Policies and activities relating to assistance in the eradication of poverty and support to vulnerable groups, including assistance during the implementation of structural adjustment programmes". 1/ The report examined the state of coordination in the United Nations system in the area of poverty alleviation and eradication and formulated specific suggestions to improve and strengthen coordination processes and structures, including the need to develop a coherent system-wide framework for action in the area of poverty alleviation. Moreover, it provided a range of recommendations, including for collaborative and joint efforts in the design and implementation of programmes, strengthened coordination for data collection and a better allocation of available resources, as well as reaching consensus on the approach to poverty reduction at the country level.

2. The consideration of the report led to a series of recommendations as part of the statement of the President of the Economic and Social Council contained in annex IV of the report of the Council to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session. 2/ Subsequently, the subject was considered by the Assembly, which adopted resolution 47/197 of 22 December 1992, entitled "International cooperation for the eradication of poverty in developing countries". In paragraph 10 of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on progress made in coordinating action, in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations and other multilateral bodies, to formulate improved and enhanced action-oriented technical cooperation programmes for the eradication of poverty in all countries, particularly in developing countries, within the framework of the United Nations system, in accordance with the policies, priorities and strategies of those countries.

3. Pursuant to that request of the General Assembly and taking into account the conclusions reached by the Economic and Social Council in 1992, the present report provides preliminary information on progress achieved since 1992 and on plans to improve further coordinated action in the fight against poverty. It should be seen in the light of the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General to the Council, 1/ and of his report to the Council in June 1993 on the "World Summit for Social Development, including the role of the United Nations system in promoting social development", 3/ as well as the "1993 Report on the World Social Situation", also submitted to the Council. 4/ Further reports on these and related issues will be prepared for the World Summit for Social Development.

II. GENERAL TRENDS

4. Technical cooperation programmes are country-specific. Moreover, their coordination is primarily the responsibility of recipient countries, as most recently reaffirmed in the General Assembly in its resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992. Thus, any consideration of the subject in terms of

paragraph 10 of resolution 47/197 should take into account the different country contexts, and should be based on country-level information. The present report has made extensive use of information provided by the United Nations system field teams, through resident coordinators, to underscore the decentralized, country-specific nature of technical cooperation programmes.

5. A preliminary review of available information indicates that poverty alleviation programmes of one sort or another are becoming central to technical cooperation provided by the United Nations system in most developing countries. There is a broad recognition that owing to the intrinsic, multidisciplinary nature of the subject-matter, a multisectoral, coordinated response by the United Nations system is essential.

6. Given the diverse, interlinked challenges of poverty alleviation, and the complex, cross-sectoral nature of poverty, agencies with sectoral mandates have found it effective to work together on this front. As a result, United Nations technical cooperation efforts in this field are being increasingly characterized by broad inter-agency collaboration.

7. Moreover, in its resolution 47/199 the General Assembly established parameters aimed at achieving enhanced coordination and better integration of United Nations system operational activities for development into national programmes, including through the country strategy note, a strengthened resident coordinator system, the programme approach and national execution. In this context, the country strategy note is viewed as a key coordinating instrument containing the response of the United Nations system to national goals and priorities, including poverty eradication. Current indications are that most developing countries will adopt the country strategy note as a planning tool over the next two years and that within many notes poverty alleviation will be a key focus, in accordance with national priorities. With national poverty-oriented programmes being the basis of United Nations cooperation, technical cooperation is increasingly being provided under coordinated national management, integrating various external support elements as part of the programme approach.

8. At the conceptual level, there is now broad recognition within the United Nations development system that poverty eradication requires a two-pronged approach: employment creation and the increase of household income on the one hand, and provision of basic human services on the other. Neither type of activity offers an adequate solution if carried out without the other. In addition, even when both approaches are being promoted, there may be a need to create social safety nets to protect the most vulnerable.

9. On the basis of preliminary reporting, it is apparent that the United Nations development system has taken many steps to meet the challenge of poverty in a coordinated manner. Moreover, initiatives are being taken that will further ensure a coordinated response. It is recognized that the pressing web of challenges on the poverty alleviation front will require continuous attention to developing and using the most effective methods to mobilize all resources in pursuit of a common goal.

III. SCOPE OF WORK AT COUNTRY LEVEL

10. Existing reporting arrangements with resident coordinators were utilized for a country-level assessment of poverty-oriented technical cooperation programmes. Moreover, a few organizations that are heavily engaged in poverty-oriented activities were asked to provide relevant information. The present report will subsequently be complemented by the documentation being prepared for the World Summit for Social Development, which will provide a fuller picture of the entire range of United Nations system activities in this area.

11. At the present time, poverty alleviation is a major goal or the top priority of the majority of country programmes of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) being submitted. The trend is for human development initiatives to be formulated within the context of poverty alleviation programmes. These initiatives and the implementation of country programmes involve many partners working together in a coordinated manner.

12. The national programmes of action supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to implement the goals agreed to at the World Summit for Children are often prepared within the context of national poverty eradication strategies, either as part of national development plans or within the framework of the UNDP-supported human development initiative. In that connection, UNICEF reports (see the report of UNICEF to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/48/321)) that some 89 countries have now finalized national programmes of action, all of which are concerned with eliminating or greatly reducing the worst manifestations of poverty by the year 2000. Together with roughly 26 national programmes still in draft, these cover almost 90 per cent of the populations in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

13. Poverty alleviation has been chosen as one of the three priority objectives of the work programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the biennium 1994-1995. There is continuing provision in the future work programme of ILO for the coordination of its activities in the field of poverty alleviation with other United Nations agencies. This covers the preparation of reports and other activities aimed at achieving greater complementarity and consistency in the design and implementation of activities concerning employment policies for poverty alleviation in the rural and informal sectors as well as better coordination with the United Nations system in these areas. In addition, with a view to strengthening its collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), studies will be undertaken aimed at developing an ILO strategy on the utilization of food aid in the fight against poverty.

14. The World Bank continues to prepare country poverty assessments, 80 of which should be completed by 1995. These assessments are on the one hand key tools for both the World Bank and national planners charged with the design of national poverty alleviation programmes. At the same time, these studies are the source of valuable lessons learned from those countries which have successfully reduced poverty in recent years.

15. An area of increased cooperation and coordination in several countries is that of poverty alleviation initiatives being carried out in the context of

disaster mitigation, targeting refugees and returnees. The focus is on enabling disaster victims to become productive members of society by providing them not only with food, health, shelter and sanitation, but also with income-generating opportunities.

IV. STRENGTHENING UPSTREAM CAPACITIES, INCLUDING DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

16. It is widely recognized that there is a need for the United Nations development system to assist in the strengthening of developing country capacities for upstream and design stages of poverty-oriented programmes. The system's efforts in that regard have frequently entailed inter-agency collaboration, as well as cooperation with donors and non-governmental organizations.

17. The Statistical Division of the Secretariat has long been a key actor in this field, building up national capacities to collect, analyse, disseminate and use appropriate statistical data. For example, through its national household survey capability programme, which is co-sponsored by UNDP and the World Bank, the Division has since 1979 been building capacities to gather the data that are the basic building blocks for poverty assessments and measurements. Supported also by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNICEF and bilateral donors, the programme was being carried out in 50 developing countries by the end of 1992. The data compiled by the household survey feeds into such studies as those of ILO on labour force, employment and wages, of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) studies on food consumption, nutrition and integrated rural development, of UNICEF on living conditions of mothers and children, and of the World Bank on income distribution, poverty and living standards. The World Bank's Social Indicators of Development 1993 has in fact introduced new "priority poverty indicators", which have drawn on the household surveys carried out with the technical assistance of the Statistical Division of the Secretariat.

18. Through an inter-agency working group, the Statistical Division is also collaborating with UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA to improve the empirical basis on which to measure, at the country level, progress towards attaining social goals, both national and such global goals as the 1981 Global Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000 of the World Health Organization (WHO), the 1985 Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women adopted by the World Conference on Women, the UNFPA-sponsored 1989 Amsterdam Declaration on a Better Life for Future Generations, and the 1990 UNICEF-sponsored World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children.

19. The inter-agency working group used the assistance of the Statistical Division to carry out pilot studies in five countries to assess the range of problems faced in measuring and monitoring social and human development progress. The studies were carried out in Kenya and Mali in sub-Saharan Africa, Ecuador and Mexico in Latin America and the Philippines in Asia. The Statistical Division and UNICEF are now considering the replication of those studies in several East African countries, including Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and the United Republic of Tanzania. While the long-term objective is to help build statistical capacity generally, a more immediate objective is to begin the

exercise in four focal countries to compile data of use in monitoring progress vis-à-vis their national plans of action.

20. Also making important contributions to the strengthening of developing countries' upstream capabilities in poverty alleviation efforts is the Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This is the only intergovernmental body with open, universal membership dealing exclusively with issues of poverty prevention, alleviation and reduction.

21. The Standing Committee organizes intergovernmental groups of experts prior to each of its sessions to discuss a topic for the exchange of experiences in anti-poverty policies and programmes. These groups include government policy makers, experts from international organizations, non-governmental organizations and community representatives. "Exchanges of experiences on poverty reduction impacts of social funds and safety nets, including mobilization of domestic and external resources for poverty alleviation" is the scheduled topic for 24 to 28 January 1994.

22. The Standing Committee also promotes workshops in developing countries to facilitate the exchange of experience on the poverty front especially in relation to topics being discussed by the Standing Committee at its following session. Thus, a workshop hosted by the Government of Tunisia will be held from 15 to 19 November 1993, co-financed by UNDP and the Government of the Netherlands and in cooperation with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, on social mobilization and organization of the poor. A second workshop, to be jointly organized with ILO, will cover the effects on poverty alleviation of structural adjustment programmes, job creation policies and means for the participation of small-scale and micro-enterprises in international trade.

23. The UNCTAD Standing Committee will identify, for consideration, areas in which technical cooperation should be strengthened. In addition, its secretariat will provide technical assistance to countries, at their request, with special consideration to the needs of the least developed countries. In that regard, UNCTAD is providing inputs into the UNDP country programme of Mongolia in relation to the establishment of a social fund for poverty alleviation. At the same time, Mongolia has been invited to participate in the intergovernmental group of experts on social funds and safety nets referred to above.

24. Also in response to the need to strengthen developing countries' capacities for collecting and analysing data on poverty, the sixteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, held at Geneva from 13 to 16 September 1993 and attended by representatives of member countries, United Nations and specialized agencies, intergovernmental bodies and non-governmental organizations, set up a task force on the measurement of poverty. The task force will be convened by the World Bank and serviced by the UNCTAD Data Management Service.

25. The members of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) continue to be quite active in the area of building developing country capacities for

collecting and analysing data on poverty. The Consultative Group has targeted six countries for collaborative assistance in the area of poverty alleviation and human development.

26. In one of these countries, for example, the Joint Consultative Group on Policy and the World Bank, under the leadership of the Government, carried out a joint situation analysis of poverty. Subsequently, a database on United Nations organizations' activities in the field of poverty alleviation was established, with information on strategies, objectives, areas of intervention, type of support, beneficiary groups and implementing agency.

27. At the regional level in Africa, the UNDP/World Bank/African Development Bank assessment of social dimensions of adjustment project set in motion a regular system of statistical compilation on poverty alleviation and under the fifth cycle of UNDP a comprehensive regional poverty alleviation programme at grass-roots level is being prepared.

28. The UNDP-funded critical poverty project in Latin America and the Caribbean has made significant progress in developing strategies, methodologies and techniques for measuring and analysing poverty using innovative techniques. It was carried out in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the ILO Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean.

29. At the regional level in Asia, UNDP, ILO and government agencies are formulating a new programme on integrated strategies for poverty alleviation. It will encompass macro- and sectoral policies with emphasis on people's participation and involvement of non-governmental organizations. FAO and the World Bank are closely associated with the preparation of the project. As an example of inter-agency collaboration at the country level in the region, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and other organizations, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, are involved in updating a database on human development indicators in India, where they are also training social scientists involved in policy research on health and education and social protection for vulnerable groups.

30. ILO undertakes many studies in collaboration with national authorities and local researchers on the factors and processes that lead to the generation and perpetuation of poverty and successful approaches and policies to alleviate it. Those detailed studies, carried out in a large number of countries, have had a particular focus in recent years on the impact of adjustment policies on poverty and those dimensions of their linkage which can enable the ILO to provide technical assistance in the areas of its competence.

31. In late 1993, the ILO International Institute for Labour Studies is organizing a symposium to explore new approaches and issues, both in the analysis of poverty and in the design of policy, to stimulate debate between researchers and practitioners about their usefulness for ILO and its constituency.

V. NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE AN INTEGRATED AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

32. The efforts of the United Nations development system to help developing countries strengthen their institutional capacities to implement their poverty alleviation programmes have generally entailed an integrated approach, with attention to both social services and income-generation, and increased participation of local communities and non-governmental organizations.

33. For example, in one Caribbean country, in 1992 poverty alleviation was selected by United Nations organizations and agencies as a theme for joint action. The programme will promote income- and employment-generation initiatives linked to physical infrastructure development that meets such basic needs as housing, water and sanitation. Coordination of the programme is being carried out by a steering committee formed by the Government, various United Nations entities and interested donors, with United Nations agencies assuming responsibility for issues falling within their areas of competence. The programme will target communities selected on the basis of social deprivation. Baseline studies of the communities to determine the scope of needed intervention and to serve as a basis for evaluation will be prepared with assistance from UNDP.

34. Inter-agency collaboration in carrying out this integrated approach to poverty alleviation is also evident in one African country, where UNICEF and WHO have been supporting a joint nutrition support programme that includes activities in maternal and child health, water and sanitation, household food security, child care and development, income-generation and research. The programme has demonstrated extremely positive results from strengthened capacities of communities to assess, analyse and take actions to address their most urgent problems.

35. In an effort to ensure broad, participatory involvement of the target population in poverty-oriented activities, a number of UNDP-funded pilot experiences that associate users in the prioritization of needs and development of strategies are producing interesting results.

36. For example, the special programme resources of UNDP are being tapped to fund the partners in development programme, currently being carried out in 32 countries in Africa, 18 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 15 in Asia and the Pacific, and in 8 Arab States. The programme supports community-based self-help initiatives, including income-generating activities designed to alleviate poverty and networking to strengthen the dialogue among non-governmental organizations, Governments and UNDP. A national selection committee on which non-governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral aid agencies and the Government are represented helps select the non-governmental organizations and grass-roots groups to be granted funds under the programme.

37. Also supported with special programme resources funds, the Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE) promotes "local-local" dialogue among municipalities, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations to improve the quality of the urban environment. In its first stage, it is being carried out in two countries per region (United Republic of Tanzania and

Senegal; Thailand and Pakistan; Jamaica and Brazil; and Egypt and Morocco). Activities include demonstration projects that improve the urban environment and break the cycle of poverty. An advisory panel, which meets annually to provide policy guidelines and review the progress of the Facility, consists of mayors, representatives of non-governmental organization networks, cities associations and bilateral donors contributing to the Fund.

38. The impact of the above innovative special programme resources initiatives will be evaluated at the beginning of 1994, and the lessons learned will be taken to the World Summit on Social Development.

39. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) domestic service programme is another UNDP-supported grass-roots activity that relies on broad community participation to sustain poverty alleviation measures.

40. Given the close linkages between environmental degradation and poverty in Africa, the UNDP-supported Africa 2000 network programme, carried out in 20 African countries with financing from Canada, Denmark, Japan and Norway, helps community-based projects that protect the environment and promote ecologically sustainable development at the grass-roots level. Groups participating in the network include African environmental and development non-governmental organizations, women's groups, village councils, farmers' associations, traditional peoples' groups, trade unions and youth groups. Linkages are established by the network with local government technical services and national research and training institutions.

41. Also in relation to the objectives of Agenda 21, an ILO concern is to ensure that the transition to more environmentally sound patterns of development is achieved in a manner that contributes to higher levels of employment and the alleviation of poverty. Studies will be undertaken on the employment and income-distribution effects of environmental policies, with special attention to the environmental vulnerability of poor communities. Advice will be provided on how to include employment considerations in assessments of environmental issues.

42. In a number of countries on which information is now available, non-governmental organizations are becoming increasingly active partners of the United Nations development system in poverty alleviation programmes. In one Asian country, for example, non-governmental organizations are working with the Government, UNDP, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), ILO, WHO, WFP, UNFPA and UNICEF in the formulation of an overall programme for poverty reduction. In a country in the Arab region, UNICEF is working with a network of 15 non-governmental organizations on reaching pockets of poverty with primary health care and vocational training. In the same country, a project assisted by UNDP and executed by a local private foundation is training government and non-governmental organization personnel in poverty alleviation strategies and approaches. For its part, WFP works with some 300 local and international non-governmental organizations involved in relief and development activities. It has recently taken steps to strengthen its support to non-governmental organizations, particularly in the context of small-scale projects in sub-Saharan Africa and for experimentation with novel uses of food aid, by delegating to its country offices the authority to provide food (up to 5 per cent of the value of WFP resources in any individual WFP-assisted project,

or an annual maximum of $200,000) as an additional commitment to local non-governmental organization-assisted projects that have similar objectives and beneficiary groups as WFP-supported projects.

43. To stimulate higher levels of economic growth and generate productive employment, ILO encourages enterprise-creation and investment programmes as well as technologies that are both employment-intensive and accessible to the poor. Over the next few years it will be developing community-based approaches to promote small enterprise development schemes in depressed rural and urban areas. It will advise on innovative approaches for the provision of information, direct support services and the selection, adaptation and transfer of suitable technologies in the informal sector. Advice will also be given on how urban infrastructure investment can be channelled to alleviate urban poverty and increase productivity and social protection in the informal sector. In addition, ILO intends to prepare a manual on how to plan and implement poverty alleviation and income-generation programmes using community-based approaches, and will strive to enhance the availability of training focusing on the needs of the poorest groups in rural communities, as well as on especially vulnerable groups such as women and girls.

44. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is relying on poverty alleviation methods that are broad-based but targeted towards the most marginalized. A key tool being used to target assistance is "vulnerability mapping". IFAD is making efforts to elaborate such mappings in a number of countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where they can also play a critical role in mitigating the effect of drought or other disasters.

45. Once the poor have been clearly identified, the challenge is to provide them with access to resources, infrastructure, technology and social services in order to increase their productivity. IFAD has found that such access works as a springboard for the rural poor and is more effective than safety nets. Moreover, it is finding that the enhanced productivity and self-reliance of the rural poor on a micro-level can lead to macroeconomic growth.

VI. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION FOR POVERTY-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES

46. Enhancing the resource mobilization capacity of developing countries for poverty alleviation has been another important focus of coordinated United Nations efforts.

47. In that regard, UNICEF and UNDP have been advocating the concept of "20/20", which calls on developing country Governments to devote a minimum of 20 per cent of their domestic budgetary expenditure to human development priorities and, similarly, encourages donor countries to allocate a minimum of 20 per cent of their development assistance to the same priorities. These efforts are already showing signs of success. At the International Conference on Assistance to Africa's Children sponsored by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and held in Senegal from 25 to 27 November 1992, "20/20" was incorporated into the Consensus of Dakar. African countries committed themselves to increasing the share of public expenditure allocated to health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation and family planning, while donor

countries agreed to increase their support for those human development priorities in countries where national Governments have taken the lead.

48. In two African countries, significant progress is being achieved with regard to resource mobilization for poverty alleviation. In the Gambia, the Joint Consultative Group on Policy assisted in the preparation of a comprehensive assessment of poverty and, in consultation with other United Nations agencies, helped formulate a national strategy and programme for poverty alleviation. This will be submitted to a donor round-table conference to be held at Geneva in December 1993.

49. As a result of a meeting of the Consultative Group on Ethiopia held in Paris in 1992, it is expected that donor support will be targeted to population groups in extreme need through the provision of safety nets. In addition, the World Bank and IMF have approved credits for structural adjustment with the objective of reducing poverty through rapid labour-intensive growth.

50. In other countries, resource mobilization for poverty alleviation is carried out in the context of the disaster relief-rehabilitation-development continuum. In Rwanda, for example, responding to the critical situation of the war-displaced population and at the request of the Government, the international community held discussions on viable ways to assist over 1 million displaced people in acute poverty. A needs assessment study led to the establishment of a coordinating mechanism for emergency assistance. Subsequently, inter-agency missions assisted in the preparation of a global plan of action for emergency humanitarian relief. Launched in April 1993, the plan involves the mobilization of $78 million. UNDP and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs will sponsor a round table in 1993 to mobilize additional resources for those purposes. In addition, the World Bank and UNDP are assisting in the preparation of a national programme for social action to assist vulnerable groups. Following the work of related joint missions, UNDP, ILO, WFP, UNV, UNICEF and other organizations are involved in the programme. WFP and UNDP have committed $16 and $3 million respectively, and the World Bank has approved loans for $19 million.

VII. INTER-AGENCY FOCUS ON IMPROVED TECHNICAL COOPERATION FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

51. Given the wealth of experience being accumulated by the United Nations system in the field of poverty alleviation and the need for a mechanism for more intensive and systematic exchange of such experience at the field and global levels, at its second regular session of 1993, held in New York from 20 to 24 September, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions established a working group on poverty alleviation. Initial members are IFAD, ILO, the United Nations, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), UNICEF, WFP, WHO, FAO and UNCTAD.

52. While members of the Consultative Committee felt that cooperation in research and analysis was now being effectively covered by the Standing Committee on Poverty Alleviation of UNCTAD and through the International Institute for Labour Studies of ILO, they considered that the Committee could make a contribution by identifying gaps and weaknesses in technical cooperation

programmes now being implemented, exploring ways to improve statistics and dissemination of information on poverty issues and establishing clear operational targets requiring inter-agency cooperative action.

53. At its initial meeting, the working group agreed to begin its work by focusing on the development of appropriate United Nations system inputs to country programmes, based on an information exchange and analysis and synthesis of actual programme experience; the identification of resource and operational gaps; the development of multisectoral strategies in application, inter alia, of resolution 47/197; and the coordination of the different sectoral structures and commitments of agencies in the field. Account will be taken of the processes leading to poverty and of the catalytic impact of the World Summit for Social Development.

Notes

1/ E/1992/47.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/47/3).

3/ E/1993/77.

4/ E/1993/50.